



MALLEUS MALEFIC ARUM

translated
with an Introduction, Biblio-
graphy and Notes by the
Rev. Montague Summers

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INTRODUCTION

IT has been recognized even from the very earliest times, during the first gropings towards the essential conveniences of social decency and social order, that witchcraft is an evil thing, an enemy to light, an ally of the powers of darkness, disruption, and decay. Sometimes, no doubt, primitive communities were obliged to tolerate the witch and her works owing to fear; in other words, witchcraft was a kind of blackmail; but directly Cities were able to co-ordinate, and it became possible for Society to protect itself, precautions were taken and safeguards were instituted against this curse, this bane whose object seemed to blight all that was fair, all that was just and good, all that was well-appointed and honourable, in a word, whose aim proved to set up on high the red standard of revolution; to overwhelm religion, existing order, and the comeliness of life in an abyss of anarchy, nihilism, and despair. In his great treatise *De Civitate Dei* S. Augustine set forth the theory, or rather the living fact, of the two Cities, the City of God, and the opposing stronghold of all that is not for God, that is to say, of all that is against Him.

This seems to be a natural truth which the inspired Doctor has so eloquently demonstrated in his mighty pages, and even before the era of Christianity men recognized the verity, and nations who had never heard the Divine command put into practice the obligation of the Mosaic maxim: Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. (Vulgate: Maleficos non patieris uiuere. Douay: Wizards thou shalt not suffer to live. *Exodus*, xxii, 18.)

It is true that both in the Greek and in the earlier Roman cults, worships often directly derived from secret and sombre sources, ancient gods, or rather demons, had their awful superstitions and their horrid rites, powers whom men dreaded but out of very terror placated; fanes men loathed but within whose shadowed portals they bent and bowed the knee perforce in trembling fear.

Such deities were the Thracian Bendis, whose manifestation was heralded by the howling of her fierce black hounds, and Hecate the terrible "Queen of the realm of ghosts," as Euripides calls her, and the vampire Mormo and the dark Summanus who at midnight hurled loud thunderbolts and launched the deadly levin through the starless sky. Pliny tells us that the worship of this mysterious deity lasted long, and dogs with their puppies were sacrificed to him with atrocious cruelty, but S. Augustine says that in his day "one could scarce find one within a while, that had heard, nay more, that had read so much as the name of Summanus" (*De Civitate Dei*, iv, 23). Nevertheless there is only too much reason to believe that this devil-god had his votaries, although his liturgy was driven underground and his supplicants were obliged to assemble in remote and secret places. Towards the end of the fifth century, the Carthaginian Martianus Capella boldly declares that Summanus is none other than the lord of Hell, and he was writing, it may be remembered, only a few years before the birth of S. Benedict; * some think that he was still alive when the Father of All Monks was born.

Although in Greek States the prosecution of witches was rare, in large measure owing to the dread they inspired, yet cases were not unknown, for Theoris, a woman of Lemnos, who is denounced by Demosthenes, was publicly tried at Athens and burned for her necromancy. It is perhaps

* The influence of this Saint over the dark powers was very remarkable, and he is especially venerated as "effugator daemonum." The Medal of S. Benedict has been found to be extremely potent against all evil spells. During a trial for witchcraft in 1647 at Nattenberg near the Abbey of Metten in Bavaria, the sorcerers acknowledged that their attempts against the monks were foiled by the holy Medal. The possessed boys of Illfurt (Alsace), 1864-69, exhibited the utmost dread of S. Benedict's Medal.

not impertinent to observe that many strange legends attached to the island of Lemnos, which is situated in the Aegean Sea, nearly midway between Mt. Athos and the Hellespont. It is one of the largest of the group, having an area of some 147 square miles. Lemnos was sacred to Hephaestus, who is said to have fallen here when hurled by Zeus from Olympus.* The workshops of the Smith-God in ancient legend were supposed to be on the island, although recent geologists deny that this area was ever volcanic, and the fires which are spoken of as issuing from it must be considered gaseous. Later the *officinae* of Hephaestus were placed in Sicily and the Lipari Islands,† particularly Hiera.

The worship of Hephaestus in later days seems to have degenerated and to have been identified with some of the secret cults of the evil powers. This was probably due to his connexion with fire and also to his extreme ugliness, for he was frequently represented as a swarthy man of grim and forbidding aspect. It should further be noted that the old Italian deity Volcanus, with whom he was to be identified, is the god of destructive fire—fire considered in its rage and terror, as contrasted with fire which is a comfort to the human race, the kindly blaze on the hearth, domestic fire, presided over by the gracious lady Vesta. It is impossible not to think of the fall of Lucifer when one considers the legend of Hephaestus. Our Lord replied, when the disciples reported: Domine, etiam daemones subiiciuntur nobis in nomine tuo‡ (Lord, the devils also are subject to us in Thy Name), Uidebam Satanam sicut fulgur de coelo cadentem (I saw Satan like lightning falling from Heaven); and Isaias says:§ "Quomodo cecidisti de

* Homer, "Iliad," I, 590, sqq. Cf. Ovid, "Fasti," III, 82: "Uolcanum tellus Hypsipylea colit." Upon which Paulus glosses: "Hoc est, Lemnos insula, at Hypsipyle Thoantis filia quae in ea regnavit."

† "Aeneid," VIII, 416—422: *Insula Sicanum iuxta latus Aeoliamque erigitur Liparen, fumantibus ardua saxis, quam subter specus et Cyclopus exesa caminis antra Aetnaeae tonant, ualidique incudibus ictus auditū referunt gemitus, striduntque cauernis stricturae Chalybum et fornacibus ignis anhelat, Uolcani domus, et Uolcania nomine tellus.*

‡ S. Luke, x, 17, 18. § Isaias, xiv, 12.

coelo, Lucifer, qui mane oriebaris? Corruisti in terram qui uulnerabas gentes?" (How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations?) Milton also has the following poetic allusion:

Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In Ancient Greece; and in Ausonian land
Men called him *Mulciber*; and how he fell
From Heav'n, they fabl'd, thrown by
angry Jove
Sheer o'er the Chrystal Battlements:
from Morn
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy
Eve,
A Summers day; and with the setting
Sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling
Star,
On Lemnos th' Aegean Ile: thus they
relate,
Erring; for he with his rebellious rout
Fell long before; nor aught avail'd him
now
To have built in Heav'n high Towrs;
nor did he scape
By all his Engins, but was headlong
sent
With his industrious crew to build in
hell.||

Hephaestus, especially in later days, is represented with one leg shortened to denote his lameness; and throughout the Middle Ages it was popularly believed that his cloven hoof was the one feature which the devil was unable to disguise. In this connexion Loki, the Vulcan of Northern Europe, will be readily remembered. Frederick Hall writes:¶ "Hephaestos, Vulcan and Loki, each lame from some deformity of foot, in time joined natures with the Pans and satyrs of the upper world; the lame sooty blacksmith donned their goatlike extremities of cloven hoofs, tail and horns; and the black dwarfs became uncouth ministers of this sooty, black, foul fiend. If ever mortal man accepted the services of these cunning metal-workers, it was for some sinister purpose, and at a fearful price—no less than that of the soul itself, bartered away in a contract of red blood, the emblem of life and the colour of fire."

There were also dark histories of

¶ "Paradise Lost," I, 738—51.

¶ "The Pedigree of the Devil," London, 1883, pp. 178—9.

murder and blood connected with Lemnos. When the Argonauts landed here they found it inhabited only by Amazons, who, having murdered all their husbands, had chosen as their queen Hypsipyle, daughter of Thoas, whom she secretly preserved alive. When this was discovered the unfortunate woman was compelled to leave the island, and being subsequently captured by pirates she was sold to Lycurgus, king of the sacred groves that surrounded the temple of Zeus Nemeus in a remote Argive valley. Hypsipyle here became the nurse of the mysterious child Archemorus, the Forerunner of Death, who was bitten by a magic serpent and vanished, portending the doom of the Seven who went against Thebes.

At a later time the Pelasgians are said to have massacred the inhabitants of Lemnos, and to have settled there with some Athenian maidens they had carried off from Attica. Afterwards these savages murdered both their wives and their children. In consequence of such atrocities Lemnian deeds became proverbial in Greek for horrors and sorceries.* It is curious to remark that a certain red clay (*terra Lemnia*) found on the island was, as Pliny tells us, employed as a remedy for wounds, and especially the bite of a snake. This latter may have some obscure connexion with the story of Archemorus. In any case enough has been said to show that this island was considered a land of mystery and ancient terrors, a fitting origin for the witch Theoris.

In Rome black magic was punished as a capital offence by the Law of the Twelve Tables, which are to be assigned to the fifth century B.C., and, as Livy† records, from time to time Draconian statutes were directed against those who attempted to blight crops and vineyards or to spread rinderpest amongst flocks and cattle. None the less it is very evident from many Latin authors and from the historians that Rome swarmed with occultists and diviners, many of whom in spite of the Lex Cornelia almost openly traded in poisons, and not infrequently in assassination to boot. Sometimes, as in the Middle Ages, a circumstance of which the *Malleus Maleficarum* most

particularly complains, the sorcerers were protected by men of wealth and high estate. This was especially the case in the terrible days of Marius and of Catiline, and during the extreme decadence of the latest Caesars. Yet, paradoxical as it may appear, such emperors as Augustus, Tiberius, and Septimius Severus, whilst banishing from their realms all seers and necromancers, and putting them to death, in private entertained astrologers and wizards among their retinue, consulting their art upon each important occasion, and often even in the everyday and ordinary affairs of life.

Nevertheless it must be noted that all the while normal legislation utterly condemned witchcraft and its works, whilst the laws were not merely carried out to their very letter, but reinforced by such emperors as Claudius, Vitellius, and Vespasian.

These prosecutions are very significant, and I have insisted upon them in some detail, as I wish to emphasize that stern and constant official opposition to witchcraft, and the prohibition under severest penalties, the sentence of death itself, of any practice or pursuit of these dangerous and irreligious arts, was demonstrably not a product of Christianity, but had long and necessarily been employed in the heathen world and among pagan peoples and among polytheistic societies. Moreover, there are even yet savage communities who visit witchcraft with death.

Accordingly, if we cite the Vincentian canon, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, we might surely say that from the earliest dawn of civilization witchcraft has been prohibited, hated, and feared.

At the time of the triumph of Christianity a decadent Empire in the last throes of paganism was corroded by every kind of superstition and occult art, from the use of petty and harmless sympathetic charms of healing to the darkest crimes of goetic ceremonial. Spells, scrying, conjurations, evokings of the dead were never more fashionable and never more keenly explored by every class and every order, from the divine Caesar in his palace to the losel peasant in his humble shed. If the disease is universal, the medicine must be sharp. It was very difficult, when the infection of crime was so

* Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," 631—38.

† IV, 50; XXV, 1; XXXIX, 16.

general, to discriminate and draw the line, to take into consideration relative differences and nice gradations. So much that was heathen, so much that was bad, was mixed up with what might seem to be simple credulity, and the harmless folk-customs of some grandam tradition and immemorial usage, a song or a country dance mayhap, innocent enough on the surface, and even pleasing, so often were but the cloak and the mask for something devilish and obscene, that the Church deemed it necessary to forbid and proscribe the whole superstition even when it manifested itself in modest fashion and seemed guileless, innoxious, and of no account. Thus, for example, to make the wind to blow or to drop is a world-wide fantasy which appears harmless enough. The Esthonians when they wish to raise a wind strike a knife into a house-beam in the direction from which they desire the wind to blow, while at the same time they croon an old-time canzonet. The underlying idea is that the gentle wind will not let any innocent thing, not even a beam, suffer without coming swiftly and breathing softly thereon to assuage the pain. But at Constantinople, in the reign of Constantine, a warlock named Sopater was put to death on a charge of binding the winds by magic, which he had at any rate essayed to do, whether or no the fact that the cornships of Egypt and Syria were detained on their voyage by calms and headwinds was actually due to his interference. The city was nearly starved, and the Byzantine mob, clamouring for bread, was ready to break out into the wildest excesses.* In Scotland witches used to raise the wind by dipping the corner of a plaid in water and beating it thrice upon a stone, crooning the following words:

I knok this rag upone this stane
To raise the wind in the divellis name,
It sall not lye till I please againe.†

It will readily be remembered that one of the chief charges brought against the coven of North Berwick witches during the famous trial of 1590 was that they performed incantations to raise a

* Eunapius, "Vitae sophistarum": Aedesius (ed. Didot, p. 463).

† "The Darker Superstitions of Scotland": T. G. Dalryell (p. 248).

tempest which might wreck the fleet that was escorting James VI when he brought his queen, Anne of Denmark, from her native country to Scotland. So we see that a superstition which in a little fishing village, when some mother was calling a fair wind for her son, or some lass whistled for a gentle breeze to fill the sails of her sweetheart's trawler, was simple and kindly enough, might yet become dangerous and deadly at least in intent when launched by malevolent witches who had the will if not the power to destroy, and who if this means failed would hasten to employ other methods that should prove far more resourceful in their means and efficacious in their results.

Accordingly, during the years 319-21 a number of laws were passed which penalized and punished the craft of magic with the utmost severity. A pagan diviner or haruspex could only follow his vocation under very definite restrictions. He was not allowed to be an intimate visitor at the house of any citizen, for friendship with men of this kind must be avoided. "The haruspex who frequents the houses of others shall die at the stake," such is the tenor of the code.‡ It is hardly an exaggeration to say that almost every year saw a more rigid application of the laws; although even as to-day, when fortune-telling and peering into the future are forbidden by the Statute-Book, diviners and mediums abound, so then in spite of every prohibition astrologers, clairvoyants, and palmists had an enormous clientèle of rich and poor alike. However, under Valens, owing to his discovery of the damning fact that certain prominent courtiers had endeavoured by means of table-rapping to ascertain who should be his successor upon the throne, in the year 367 a regular crusade, which in its details recalls the heyday of Master Matthew Hopkins, was instituted against the whole race of magicians, soothsayers, mathematici, and theurgists, which perhaps was the first general prosecution during the Christian era. Large numbers of persons, including no doubt many innocent as well as guilty, were put to death, and a veritable panic swept through the Eastern world.

The early legal codes of most

‡ "Codex Theodosianus," Lib. IX, tit. xvi, 1, 1.

European nations contain laws directed against witchcraft. Thus, for example, the oldest document of Frankish legislation, the Salic Law (*Lex salica*), which was reduced to a written form and promulgated under Clovis, who died 27 November, 511, mulcts those who practise magic with various fines, especially when it could be proven that the accused launched a deadly curse, or had tied the Witch's Knot. This latter charm was usually a long cord tightly tied up in elaborate loops, among whose reticulations it was customary to insert the feathers of a black hen, a raven, or some other bird which had, or was presumed to have, no speck of white. This is one of the oldest instruments of witchcraft and is known in all countries and among all nations. It was put to various uses. The wizards of Finland, when they sold wind to sailors who were becalmed in harbour, used to enclose the wind in the three knots of a rope. If the first knot were undone a gentle breeze sprang up; if the second, it blew a mackerel gale; if the third, a hurricane.* But the Witch's Ladder, as it was often known, could be used with far more baleful effects. The knots were tied with certain horrid maledictions, and then the cord was hidden away in some secret place, and unless it were found and the strands released the person at whom the curse was directed would pine and die. This charm continually occurs during the trials. Thus in the celebrated Island-Magee case, March 1711, when a coven of witches was discovered, it was remarked that an apron belonging to Mary Dunbar, a visitor at the house of the afflicted persons, had been abstracted. Miss Dunbar was suddenly seized with fits and convulsions, and sickened almost to death. After most diligent search the missing garment was found carefully hidden away and covered over, and a curious string which had nine knots in it had been so tied up with the folds of the linen that it was beyond anything difficult to separate them and loosen the ligatures. In 1886 in the old belfry of a village church in England there were accident-

ally discovered, pushed away in a dark corner, several yards of incle braided with elaborate care and having a number of black feathers thrust through the strands. It is said that for a long while considerable wonder was caused as to what it might be, but when it was exhibited and became known, one of the local grandmothers recognized it as a Witch's Ladder, and, what is extremely significant, when it was engraved in the *Folk Lore Journal* an old Italian woman to whom the picture was shown immediately identified it as *la ghirlanda delle streghe*.

The laws of the Visigoths, which were to some extent founded upon the Roman law, punished witches who had killed any person by their spells with death; whilst long-continued and obstinate witchcraft, if fully proven, was visited with such severe sentences as slavery for life. In 578, when a son of Queen Fredegonde died, a number of witches who were accused of having contrived the destruction of the Prince were executed. It has been said in these matters that the ecclesiastical law was tolerant, since for the most part it contented itself with a sentence of excommunication. But those who consider this spiritual outlawry lenient certainly do not appreciate what such a doom entailed. Moreover, after a man had been condemned to death by the civil courts it would have been somewhat superfluous to have repeated the same sentence, and beyond the exercise of her spiritual weapons, what else was there left for the Church to do?

In 814 Louis le Pieux upon his accession to the throne began to take very active measures against all sorcerers and necromancers, and it was owing to his influence and authority that the Council of Paris in 829 appealed to the secular courts to carry out any such sentences as the Bishops might pronounce. The consequence was that from this time forward the penalty of witchcraft was death, and there is evidence that if the constituted authority, either ecclesiastical or civil, seemed to slacken in their efforts the populace took the law into their own hands with far more fearful results.

In England the early Penitentials are greatly concerned with the repression of pagan ceremonies, which under the cover of Christian festivities were very largely practised at Christmas and

* Olaus Magnus, "Gentium septentr. hist.," III, 15. A Stornoway woman sold a mariner such a cord with three knots. "Our Highland Folklore Heritage," Alexander Polson, Inverness, 1926, p. 73.